U.S. in the Modern World Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**The Role of Government and the Flint Water Crisis**

**Introduction:**

In this unit, we have explored the ways in which the role of government in providing for people’s well being has evolved in the United States over the century. You’ve learned about the origins of the many programs, services, and regulations which shape the role government plays in the lives of Americans. We have examined the debates that exist around this topic, both in the past and today. As a final part of this unit, we will look at how people rely on government to support certain basic needs – in this case, clean drinking water – and what happens when government doesn’t fulfill that basic responsibility.

**Sources:**

**“Undrinkable” –** a documentary made by high school students in Davison, Michigan (just outside Flint) in December, 2015

**PBS Newshour Extra: “Poison Water in Flint Affects Everyone’s Health – Including Kids” –** video from January 21, 2016

**USA Today: “5 Things to Know About the Water Crisis in Flint –** article and video from January 20, 2016

**Warm-Up Questions (Answer *before* watching the videos)**

1. What, if anything, do you know about the city of Flint, Michigan?
2. What, if anything, do you know about effects of lead poisoning?
3. Whose responsibility is it to ensure healthy living conditions (like clean drinking water) to the pubic?
4. What types of sources do cities and towns typically use for drinking water?
5. How would you know if your water was not safe to drink?

**Content questions (Answer *while/after* you watch the videos and read the articles)**

1. Describe the recent economic history of the city of Flint, Michigan.
2. Why did Flint stop buying its water from the Detroit Water System and switch to the Flint River? Who made this decision?
3. When did Flint residents first start noticing problems with their water? What did state and local health officials first declare about the safety of the water when concerns were raised?
4. Why are high lead levels in drinking water considered so dangerous? Which age group is most affected by this danger?
5. How did Michigan state health officials respond to the reports of high levels of lead in Flint’s water (and in the blood of many children)?
6. How have the citizens of Flint been coping as a result of the lead contamination?
7. What legal steps have the people of Flint, and the city government, taken to gain financial relief for their community in the midst of the water crisis?

**Reflection questions (Answer *after* completing all of the prior steps)**

1. Why do you think the state and local government’s response to the increased levels of lead in Flint’s water so delayed?
2. Who is to blame for allowing this crisis to reach this point? How should they be held responsible?
3. Given the known effects of lead poisoning on children, what additional issues can Flint likely expect to see in the coming years?
4. In the PBS video, Dr. Lawrence Reynolds said he thinks the response to the crisis would have been very different if it happened in places with different racial and economic demographics from Flint. Do you agree? If so, how do you think the situation would have differed? If not, why do you think he is wrong?